



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B

Psalm 126 – All human life is here

Readings: Jeremiah 31:7-9, Ps 126, Hebrews 5:1-6, Mark 10: 46-52

From time to time I chastise myself for the extraordinary rarity with which I preach on the Psalms. I know that I am far from alone in this pattern of neglect when it comes to the exposition of the Word. And, for what it's worth, I don't recall, in forty-five years of preaching a parishioner ever complaining of this omission or indeed even noticing it.

It is strange. Strange because, as priests and sayers of the daily offices of the Church, the Psalms are our daily bread and butter. The Psalter, some of it three thousand years old, is the hymn book of the People of God, the expression of their deepest relationship in prayer and practicality to the One True and Eternal God. They contain within them the Holy Spirit inspired responses of Man to God and God to Man, in times of sorrow and adversity, in times of triumph and celebration, love, hate, failures, success, alienations and returnings. In short, in the old banner headline of the late and unlamented News of the World, ALL HUMAN LIFE IS HERE.

So, my apologies for this grievous fault and now to the business of the day; Psalm 126, this morning's brief exultation, is a good place to start. It opens a door, not only on the world of the past but into the terrifying reality of

today. It contains, for my money, some of the most beautiful lines in Holy Scripture and an insight, both into the temporal and the eternal.

The Psalm is not one of David's but from a much later period. It is from the end of the exile. Let me briefly put that in context. The kingdom of Israel, in the time of King Solomon's useless heir, divided in two. Ten tribes in the North became Israel. The two remaining tribes, around Jerusalem, became Judah. Confusion abounds for the ordinary reader because sometimes 'Israel' is used to denote just the Northern Kingdom—sometimes 'the whole shooting match.' For the Northern Kingdom think Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Amos amongst others.

In the middle of the 8th century BC the northern kingdom (Israel) fell to the brutal Assyrian Empire. The entire governing class were killed or exiled, the remnant of peasantry all that remained of the once thriving client state. These are the 'Ten Lost tribes of Israel' which vanish from historical view. Judah survived and continued for about a century and a half before making a fatally misplaced gamble in its foreign policy and being pulverised into submission and exile by the might of the now rampant Babylonian Empire of Nebuchadnezzar. For this tragic period think Jeremiah.

The same process was repeated. Those of the governing class who were not exterminated were taken into exile. See Ezekiel.

But here the story changes. Maintaining religious solidarity in exile via the development of the Synagogue system, there being no Temple to turn or return to – Solomon's jewel having been razed to the ground – a remarkable and utterly providential and unique thing occurs. At the end of

the promised seventy year exile the Persian Empire under Cyrus, grants the Jews leave to return home and rebuild Jerusalem. (Ezra & Nehemiah). It is this extraordinary event that is marked by this morning's Psalm. The, humanly- speaking, impossible dream of return, renewal, restoration and rebuilding.

'When the Lord delivered Zion from bondage, it seemed like a dream.'

- indeed beyond their wildest dreams but promised by God.

And then this wonderful image of almost hysterical rejoicing,

'Then was our mouth filled with laughter and there our tongues bubbling over with songs of praise'. What a contrast to the early days of exile in Psalm 137 where, *'by the waters of Babylon we sat down and we wept, while our captives demanded that we sing for them. How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?'*

Out of the long years of exile and renewal, God has restored His people. Those who were obliged to sow in tears now reap in joy. The heathen, in turn, are amazed by the works of the One True God. The little tribe of Judah, penitent and reformed, against all historical odds, has survived and will return to the Land of the Promise to Abraham, the land of the Davidic kingdom. It is a psalm bursting with the joy of the redeemed and, for us, ought to be a reminder of the pattern of our salvation and the response of our hearts and mouths when we sing God's glory and thank Him for His amazing offer to us of salvation and return. It is a picture of an historically unique event but also a pattern for the individual soul. Alienated from God by our infidelity and sin, the place of exile can also be for us the place of penitence, reform, renewal and restoration.

When we leave the confessional, when we approach the Blessed Sacrament, we should have some of that feeling of unrestrained joy and

hearts bursting with thanksgiving. Who could have dreamed that lost, fallen, sinful, mortal Man would be redeemed by no less than God Himself condescending to share our humanity and, through death and resurrection, lead us home to the Land of the Promise?

It is no accident that the Morning Prayer of both the Ancient and the Ordinarie rite always begins with Ps.95, *'Venite exsultemus Domino'* , *'Come let us joyfully praise the Lord, our Saviour. Let us come into His Presence and sing songs of joy and thanksgiving.'* Or to put it another way.....

'When the Lord delivered us from the bondage of exile, it seemed as if we were dreaming. Our mouths were filled with laughter and our lips overflowing with songs of praise.'

Amen and Amen.